

April 6, 1956

(FULL TEXT)

Eric Sevareid at 11:10 P.M. over WTOP (Washington) and the
CBS Network:

"When the Congress returns next week the Senate will open debate on a ticklish subject, a resolution by Mansfield, of Montana, that a joint Congressional committee be created to keep running checks on the most secret operations in Washington, the CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY.

"This agency headed by Mr. Allen Dulles, brother of the Secretary of State, is a statutory agency and answerable directly to the President and to the National Security Council, which has led, since superseded the cabinet as the highest general policy-making group with the administration.

"All great powers in this dangerous world maintain secret espionage and counterespionage organizations and CIA is ours. It conducts cloak and dagger operations, but for the most part it is a vast clearinghouse of information, military, political and economic, concerning every part of the world it can find access to. It is something new in the peacetime history of this Democracy in terms of its size, scope, and systematic professional approach.

"It has always opposed, and not yet been subjected to Congressional scrutiny of its more secret operations. That threat arose a couple of years ago when Senator McCarthy tried to investigate its personnel with claims, never documented, that the CIA harbored subversives. It was the view of the administration that an inquiry of that kind would have ended the usefulness of CIA. Knowledge that he would be personally be accountable to Congressmen would, of course, tend to make agents in the field timid men. The intelligence officers of other governments working with CIA would have immediately severed their connections, in fact, some friendly governments so stated. The McCarthy type scrutiny never came about.

"Senator Mansfield is not proposing anything remotely of that kind, but he has the support of some 14 other Senators asking a joint watchdog committee over CIA, something like the highly responsible and tight-lipped Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. It is their belief that the CIA's present accountability to Congress by way of appropriations and armed services sub-committee is by no means sufficient and the Congress, in reality, knows very little about Central Intelligence, has no way to judge whether it is effective or not.

"It seems quite likely that the Mansfield resolution will be approved by the Senate. Since it is a resolution, not a bill, the President, who is opposed to such a committee, would not be able to exercise a veto should the predictions prove wrong and the measure pass.

"This whole issue of whether CIA is protecting our security, and how to be sure that it has been argued ever since the agency was created. Several years ago, the first Hoover Commission on Organization of the Executive recommended that a Congressional committee be set up as Senator Mansfield wants. A task force of the second Hoover Commission made the same recommendation but the commission itself refused to endorse this. Instead it asked that Congress consider naming a committee of private citizens and that the President name such a committee himself. The President did so in January and an eight-man committee of distinguished citizens is working now. It has full access to CIA operations and records, including its clandestine activities.

"The agency itself does not take the position that working with a Congressional watchdog group would be impossible but it argues that its present accountability to the President's committee, to the Security Council, the Budget Bureau and the various subcommittees should be sufficient. Senator Mansfield disagrees. It is believed that secret intelligence is part of our front line defense, and that Congress can no longer take it on faith however much it respects Mr. Dulles.

"History is strewn with examples of secret intelligence like the French Deuxieme Bureau, failing its country when crisis came. It is strewn with examples of such organizations becoming a domestic political menace. The question at issue is now in a free democratic society and in the interests of security do the people keep watch on secret operations without spoiling the secrecy and harming security."